



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Moving Vocabulary Research to Classroom Practice

Indiantown, FL • April 2007

Topic: Teaching Literacy in English to K-5 English Learners

Practice: Teach Vocabulary

Highlights

- How Warfield identified vocabulary needs and went to the research for solutions
- How the school selected Isabel Beck's research as a focus and established a teacher study group
- Definition of Beck's three tiers of words
- School's success with the approach and benefits of adopting a reading vocabulary program

About the Site

Warfield Elementary School (K-4)

Indiantown, FL

Demographics

75% Hispanic, 5% White, 17% Black

96% Free or reduced-price lunch

67% English language learners

Warfield Elementary School uses an inclusive, English immersion approach for their English learners, the majority of whom are of Guatemalan descent and speak either Spanish or one of several Guatemalan Indian dialects, which lack a written language. Distinctive features of the school include:

- A continuous improvement model for instruction; data disaggregation and analysis, facilitated by a reading coach and writing/math coach, drive all instruction
- Instructional calendars for all content areas and grade levels that show standards being taught, instructional activities, and assessments to monitor student progress
- A schoolwide reading program based on an external model, along with a core textbook program
- Data available to teachers on fast turnaround, either in profiles produced by the reading coach or through reports from district and state databases
- Whole-group instruction based on the instructional calendars, combined with flexible small-group instruction based on students' needs
- Interventions provided within the classroom, including several that are technology-based
- Instructional strategies that are research-based; for example, a vocabulary program that is based on Isabel Beck's research
- All teachers with an ESOL endorsement on their teaching certificates
- Paraprofessionals who speak the children's native languages to ease the transition into school and support teachers in working with students

Full Transcript

Hi, I'm Loreen Francescani, principal at Warfield Elementary School, which is in Indiantown, Florida.

Serving such a high-poverty population, we have tremendous vocabulary issues, and it was very obvious in the test scores for the school. In the reading information we got back, the areas that were glaringly low were word analysis, word meaning, and comprehension, which, of course, was affected by word meaning, or lack of knowledge of word meaning, so we really knew that we had to tackle that vocabulary area, and try and build children's use of the language and understanding of the language.

One of the first things—and we've done this approach with a number of our weak areas—we did research online, and found out the names of people that were doing work with vocabulary development, and Beck's name kept coming up over and over again.

Then, in the state of Florida, we have, through our Department of Education, something called the Florida Center for Reading Research. One of the services that they provide is information on the five key components of reading. So, in looking through some of the PowerPoints that they have online with speeches their personnel had delivered at key conferences, was where I first found Isabel Beck's book. I had seen research articles about her online, but that was where I first saw the book. We brought it to school.

We purchased about 15 copies initially, and brought it to school, shared it with teachers, told them what the basis of her research was and what we were hoping we were going to be able to accomplish with it, and would people be interested in participating in a study group. So our reading coach formulated a study group after school, and it was completely voluntary. She really had a nice cross-section of who came, from different grade levels.

At that point, in Beck's book, she describes how you classify words, and how a teacher, through using trade literature, can make selections of important words to share with children.

In her book, *Building Robust Vocabulary*, she delineates words in three tiers. Her tier one refers to more common language words, common nouns and verbs, which really don't require a lot of instruction: mom, dad, table, chair, baby, ball— words that children tend to pick up fairly easily. Her tier three words are the academic content language, which is very specific to a content area: more of our science vocabulary, math vocabulary, very specific social studies vocabulary that relates to that area. Then, tier two words are these other words that lend themselves to, I think, one of the nice things about her tier two words that she talks about, it really lends itself to not just learning those words, which are very descriptive, very applicable to a variety of situations, but her strategy includes children learning synonyms and antonyms for those words, so not only are you learning those key words, you are learning other words that share the meaning, or words that are the opposite of, which opens up a number of other words to children that perhaps they would not have come in contact with.

So, that's how we started, and people in Beck's book, she even talks about and suggests trade books you can use. She makes selections within certain trade books, and tells you which ones she would choose. So, teachers have lots of information about how to implement the program. That's how people started doing it in their rooms. As they were participating in this study group, they would read a little bit, go back and try an idea, then try it with the book, and see if it worked for them. People got very excited about it.

After that year, Isabel Beck actually had a program which was published by Pearson, through Steck Vaughn, and it's called *Elements of Reading Vocabulary*, and that particular program took a lot of the legwork out of it for teachers because it provides an anthology of literature with the words already selected for you. One of the very nicest things about it is it provides for the teachers these incredible pictures, which we know for second language learners are key to learning. It provides these great pictures that illustrate the meaning of these words. Anyone that's been a teacher would know how long you could search for a picture that matches a word as beautifully as these do. So, that's an integral part of the program: the visualization of what this word means—children in the Beck's program that we're using, *Elements of Reading Vocabulary*, she gives them suggestions for activities they can do in the classroom—so there are lots of physical involvement with words. There's play with words. They are conversing with each other using the words. There's a tally system involved, so they get credit every time one of their new words is being used. So, it really has a lot built in to encourage children to use these new words, learn these new words, enjoy these new words, and have fun with the language.

The nice thing about it is it gives teachers, I think once they use it for a while, they then become very comfortable with whatever piece of literature they pick up, and selecting their own words. They are not limited to the ones that she has selected through her particular program, but are able to use her approach with how to teach children the meaning of new words or any words they come in contact with.